GUIDE

A LOCAL ROUND TABLE

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THIS BOOKLET IS INTENDED FOR PEOPLE INTERESTED IN BUILDING A MORE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY THROUGH ESTABLISHMENT OF A LOCAL ROUND TABLE TO FOCUS PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT.

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THE PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

In these times of environmental concerns, economic stress and pressure for more and better social services, "think globally, act locally" takes on a special meaning.

People are concerned about the future sustainability of our environment, our economy and our social services. As described in Caring for the World: A Strategy for Sustainability published by the World Conservation Union, sustainability means "a process or state that can be maintained indefinitely. It recognizes explicitly that qualitative development may be maintained, while quantitative growth in the scale of the economy is constrained by the capacity of the ecosystem to regenerate raw materials and absorb waste."

In many ways, sustainability begins at the local level, where issues regarding the environment, the economy and social well-being are felt most acutely and where the motivation to deal with these issues is the strongest.

Through its consultations around the province, the British Columbia Round Table on the Environment and the Economy has found that community values and priorities are changing. There is a growing awareness that the economy, the environment and social well-being are all connected to each other. People are re-thinking community growth and development to achieve a better balance among these fundamental aspects of sustainability.

Even more significant is the fact that people around the province want to become involved in the process of achieving this balance. A desire for greater

Sustainable development is "development which meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987

The formation of local round tables can be a meaningful step in providing local involvement in decision-making, and in achieving sustainability in the environment, economy and social services of this province.

participation in local decision-making about the environment, resources and land use is one of the strongest themes that the public has expressed to the Round Table.

Part of the British Columbia Round Table's mandate is to advise the provincial cabinet on methods and mechanisms to encourage local participation in sustainable development. The creation of regional or community round tables is a particularly appropriate mechanism, and the Round Table has established the Local Round Table Task Force to advise on their establishment.

THE LOCAL ROUND TABLE TASK FORCE

Since its inception, the Task Force has been gathering information about local round table initiatives in the province and in the rest of Canada. During the Round Table's public forums, Task Force members listened to citizens express their concerns about the future of their communities and their desire to be involved in local decision-making. The Task Force also held a workshop on the potential role of local round tables at the annual meeting of the Union of British Columbia Municipalities.

Many individuals, interest groups and communities have responded enthusiastically to the idea of local round tables and the Task Force has been flooded with requests for more information and assistance on how to establish a local round table.

The formation of local round tables can be a meaningful step in providing local involvement in decision-making, and in achieving sustainability in the environment, economy and social services of this province. This guide is designed to assist communities interested in creating or transforming an existing local body into a round table.

LOCAL ROUND TABLES AND COMMUNITIES

Local round tables can be said to represent communities. In this guide "communities" are defined broadly to encompass a collection of people with some form of geographic affiliation and with common concerns. A local round table may be established for a village, a town, a city, or a much wider region that encompasses a range of rural and urban populations. The basis for organizing a local round table should be flexible to meet the needs of the community involved. A local round table need not always be newly created, as there may be existing community-based bodies that can take on the role of a local round table.

WHAT IS A ROUND TABLE?

The term "round table" suggests an open forum where people with different perspectives can come together to deal with issues of common concern and seek agreement on ways of resolving them. Everyone around the table has an equal say, and each perspective carries equal weight.

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Round tables in British Columbia began in 1989, when the British Columbia Task Force on the Environment and the Economy recommended the establishment of a provincial round table to advise the provincial government. The Task Force also recognized that a single body cannot reasonably consider all the issues that occur in a province as large and diverse as British Columbia. It supported the concept of regional and community round tables, suggesting that they would operate most effectively if formed as the result of local interest and desire rather than provincial policy.

The special character of local round tables:

- **promote sustainability.**
- **multi-stakeholder.**
- **continuing bodies.**
- **consensus-based.**

A SPECIAL ROLE: CRITERIA FOR A LOCAL ROUND TABLE

What makes a local round table different from other types of local advisory committees and task forces? Local round tables have a *broad mandate to address sustainability* and how it can be achieved at the local or regional level. To be effective, they must take environmental, economic and social factors equally into account rather than focusing on just one of these facets of sustainability or limiting their criteria to a particular sector. This does not preclude local round tables from examining specific issues, but they must do so within the broad context of sustainability.

Local round tables examine sustainability issues from all perspectives. They are *multi-stakeholder*, with representatives from each major sector of the community or region.

Sustainability is a long-term goal that requires ongoing evaluation and the ability to adjust to changing environmental, economic and social circumstances. Similarly, local round tables are *continuing bodies*, with the ability to adapt to change, but with the consistent mandate of pursuing sustainability.

Most significantly, round tables operate by *consensus*. Common understanding and agreement are needed to achieve sustainability. Round tables strive to embody this philosophy by basing their resolutions on consensus rather than other forms of decision-making.

It is very likely that there are community- based organizations throughout the province that are not called round tables, but are operating by these criteria and fulfilling the same functions. They might be known as land use advisory

committees or local resource commissions. It does not matter what these organizations call themselves, provided their overall goal is the environmental, economic and social sustainability of the community.

Nonetheless, we encourage the use of the name "round table" to ensure such community organizations are not perceived to be addressing only a specific set of issues and that their mandates remain broadly defined to encompass the full range of values that are needed to embrace community sustainability

WHAT DOES A LOCAL ROUND TABLE DO?

The general mandate of a local round table is to explore options and determine ways that the community or region can become more sustainable, taking the local environment, economy and social fabric into account. It is responsible for consulting with the community on these options, as well as familiarizing its citizens with ways of achieving sustainability at the local level. A local round table also advises local government on sustainability matters. There are a variety of functions that local round tables can perform to fulfill this mandate.

A local round table can develop a vision of its community or region as a sustainable entity.

DRAFT A VISION, PRINCIPLES, GOALS

A local round table can develop a vision of its community or region as a sustainable entity – a vision that addresses key characteristics of the community. What economic endeavours are viable? What uses of land and resources are needed? What features of the natural environment are of particular significance and need protection? What social services and amenities are desired? What kinds of public processes and approaches are needed to achieve these objectives?

A community vision can be the basis for developing locally-based principles and goals for sustainability.

A community vision can be the basis for developing locally-based principles and goals for sustainability that the community as a whole can review, debate, and revise. These principles and goals can be advanced to local government to guide its decisions affecting community development. Local businesses, organizations and citizens could also be encouraged to adopt these principles in guiding their planning and day-to-day activities.

Principles established by the British Columbia Round Table and other round tables across the country provide examples that a local round table can consider in formulating its own principles and goals. Sustainability principles of the Round Table on the Environment and the Economy are:

- Limit our impact on the living world to stay within its carrying capacity (the ability to renew itself from natural and human impacts).
- Preserve and protect the environment (conserve life support systems, biological diversity, and renewable resources).
- Hold to a minimum the depletion of non-renewable resources.
- Promote long-term economic development that increases the benefits from a given stock of resources without drawing down on our stocks of environmental assets (through diversifying and making resource use more efficient).
- Meet basic needs and aim for a fair distribution of the benefits and the costs of resource use and environmental protection.
- Provide a system of decision making and governance that is designed to address sustainability (is more proactive, participatory, long term).
- Promote values and actions that support sustainability (through information and education).

PROVIDE INFORMATION, TEACH SKILLS AND ENCOURAGE EFFORTS IN SUSTAINABLE LIVING

A priority for local round tables might be to heighten the public's understanding and knowledge of sustainability. A local round table can sponsor seminars, workshops, demonstration projects and special events aimed at raising community awareness of the need for, and ways of achieving, sustainability in daily life. Its members can give talks to schools, clubs and associations on sustainability and what it means to their community. A local round table can maintain a special reading collection on sustainability matters in conjunction with a local library. It can establish awards that recognize successes in promoting sustainability. And it can publish booklets and brochures that encourage sustainability – particularly the vision and principles that it develops – or that address specific sustainability issues.

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REVIEW GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

A local round table can review policies and programs of local government to see how well they reflect its vision and principles of sustainability. It can also review provincial or federal government initiatives that impact on the community, and coordinate local input to those initiatives.

A local round table can also make recommendations to the appropriate level of government on the need for policies or programs in specific areas of sustainability. For example, the need for a community recreational plan, public awareness campaign, or recycling program could be addressed. It can go further by developing and recommending the elements of policies and the programs needed to implement them. Where local, provincial and federal government programs appear to overlap, addressing similar management areas

A local round table can become involved in specific issues of concern to local sustainability.

with differing objectives, a local round table could suggest how these programs can be carried out in a more integrated and efficient fashion within the community.

ADDRESS SPECIFIC ISSUES

A local round table can become involved in specific issues of concern to local sustainability, such as waste disposal systems, commercial and residential development, or traffic control. It can:

- compile and evaluate relevant information and disseminate it to the public;
- investigate various sides of an issue and formulate recommendations;
- develop proposals or responses from a sustainability perspective;
- facilitate citizen debate and expression of concerns; and
- advocate sustainability and provide advice to decision-makers.

MONITOR THE STATE OF LOCAL SUSTAINABILITY

"State of the environment" reporting has been going on at international, national and provincial levels for several years, but rarely has it been undertaken on a community or regional level. Local round tables can lay the groundwork for local state-of-sustainability assessments by identifying indicators of sustainability in their community or region such as air and water quality levels, or residents' satisfaction with social services. They can examine existing data reports or recommend ways to monitor these indicators. In conjunction with government or research institutes, local round tables can also initiate public awareness programs about the relevance of these indicators and help organize volunteer programs to monitor some of the local indicators.

HELP RESOLVE CONFLICTS OVER LAND AND RESOURCE USE

Conflicts over land and resource use occur throughout British Columbia. There are processes and organizations already evolving in many areas ,either initiated by government or by the communities themselves, to address these conflicts. For instance on a province-wide scale, the newly-formed provincial Commission on Resources and the Environment (CORE) intends to establish regional and local committees as part of its land use program, to advise it on solutions to local land use issues

Being consensus-based, a local round table can be of great assistance in this regard. It can help to establish processes for resolving particularly contentious local issues. Based on its own model of consensus-based decision-making, a round table can recommend who should be involved and how, and suggest sources of appropriate expertise. A round table could even take an active role in facilitating the resolution process, but this role requires considerable skill and is suggested only if one or more members have the appropriate training or expertise.

In addition, the round table model can provide an effective forum for seeking the consensus that is needed to resolve many of these types of conflicts. Local round tables could specifically address land and resource use issues as part of their sustainability mandate, and could, for instance, take on the role and functions envisioned by CORE.

The round table model can provide an effective forum for seeking the consensus that is needed to resolve many of these types of conflicts.

A local round table can facilitate communication among community sectors.

ENHANCE COMMUNITY SELF SUFFICIENCY THROUGH NETWORKING

A local round table can facilitate communication among community sectors, for example, by encouraging sectoral reports and updates to its members and to the public. It can sponsor networking meetings or fairs, or publish contact lists on a regular basis through its own newsletter. Networking allows people from different sectors of the community to identify overlapping efforts and opportunities for cooperation, and helps people find expertise that complements their own.

"HANDS-ON" EFFORTS

Finally, a local round table can organize or undertake sustainability-oriented projects. For example, street cleanup or beautification projects; economic diversification pilot projects; habitat enhancement; trail development; local job re-training programs; recycling depots; and energy efficiency demonstration projects.

OTHER WAYS IN WHICH LOCAL ROUND TABLES HELP COMMUNITIES

Carrying out any of the activities described above can provide many tangible benefits. A local round table can also assist a community in many, other subtle ways as well.

- A local round table *raises community awareness* of the need for sustainability and ways of achieving it in the way we think and act.

- A local round table helps to *generate ideas and promote information exchange* by bringing together people with different backgrounds, perspectives and values around a common goal.

- A local round table *broadens the horizons* of individuals and sectors that participate by bringing together interests that might not otherwise be exposed to each others' perspectives.

- A local round table helps to *avoid or reduce conflicts and encourages collaboration* by enabling debate and understanding in forums outside the political arena that emphasize problem-solving rather than position-taking.

- By focusing energies and know-how from a wide range of interests, a local round table acts to *harness expertise and enthusiasm* in pursuit of the common goal of sustainability.

A local round table helps to avoid or reduce conflicts and encourages collaboration.

FIRST TASKS FOR A LOCAL ROUND TABLE

- Develop a definition of sustainability from the particular perspective of the community or region.

- Develop a community vision statement for sustainability.

- Generate workable, community-oriented principles of sustainability.

- Develop an agenda of priority sustainability issues and initiatives, including explicit tasks and time frames.

- Plan a workshop to brainstorm ways of measuring progress towards sustainability through community-based indicators.

- Develop a strategy for reporting on sustainability: newsletters, updates on activities and achievements within the community.

ESTABLISHING A LOCAL ROUND TABLE

How does a community or region go about creating a local round table? The following points lay out features and options to be considered.

THE INITIATIVE

Local round tables are generally established in one of two ways. They can be set up by the community itself, as a body to address and advise the community on a wide range of issues and to act as a common voice in dealing with government. Alternatively they can be created by a local government, primarily to provide it with advice on sustainability matters.

It is not necessary to create a new body if an existing group or organization is prepared to take on the role and has the basic characteristics of a local round table, namely:

- it has multi-stakeholder representation;
- it is capable of assuming a broad mandate and commitment to address all aspects of sustainability;
- it is committed to an ongoing role and is long-term in its perspective; and
- it operates by consensus.

There are no predefined rules regarding the physical area that a local round table can represent.

Regardless of how it is established a local round table should be recognized and endorsed by the applicable local government so that it can affect public policy in the interests of sustainability.

GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE

There are no predefined rules regarding the physical area that a local round table can represent, other than the requirement for some geographic cohesion and sense of common purpose. There are several options in determining the

geographic area that a local round table represents. Using existing political or administrative boundaries (e.g., municipalities, regional districts, economic development regions) is one obvious method, and has the advantage of relating easily to an identifiable government entity.

Natural or ecological boundaries such as watersheds and coastal zones may also be considered, particularly when these form a physically definable community with common environmental, economic and social concerns.

There are also regions that can be defined on the basis of a traditional community identity. The Sunshine Coast or the West Kootenays are examples of such "social" regions.

SIZE

The size of a local round table is dictated to some extent by the geographic area and size of population that is being represented. In its guide to local round tables, the Ontario Round Table suggests a minimum of 12 and a maximum of 24, but this is just a rule of thumb. Flexibility is key in considering an appropriate size to achieve an adequate level of representation. If a special skill or expertise is needed, extra participants can be invited to participate through subcommittees that deal with specific projects. This helps to expand the participation of the community in the pursuit of sustainability.

Flexibility is key in considering an appropriate size to achieve an adequate level of representation

In addition the number of members can be altered over time as a round table determines its needs; by adding members if required, or by not replacing members as they resign or finish their terms. When replacing members or introducing new ones, however, there is always the problem of "bringing them

up to speed" with the activities and collective philosophies that a local round table will have developed. A local round table must be prepared to provide new members with documentation of its basic principles and understandings, and to make special efforts to welcome and help them.

MEMBERSHIP

A local round table is only as comprehensive in its outlook and effective in its activities as the people who comprise it. Sustainable development encompasses a wide range of topics and a local round table must be able to address them with knowledge and objectivity. The following features should be kept in mind in determining who should be on a local round table.

A local round table is only as comprehensive in its outlook and effective in its activities as the people who comprise it.

Membership should include, but not be limited to, representation of major sectors in the community so that a local round table encompasses a full range of opinions and perspectives. Examples of community sectors to be considered include:

- agriculture, ranching
- business, industry
- education (school boards, institutions)
- environmental, wildlife interests
- ethnic, cultural, faith communities
- financial institutions
- first nations
- fisheries, aquaculture
- forestry
- government (local, provincial, federal)
- health and social services
- labour, professional associations
- mining
- recreation, tourism, cottagers
- research, scientists
- social interests, service clubs
- utilities
- youth, students, seniors

In identifying the applicable sectors to be represented, however, a local round table should strive for balanced representation of community interests and values.

It must be impressed on both members and the public that while members come to the round table as representatives of *sectors* of the community, and not as spokespersons for specific interest groups, they participate as individuals. Membership should also represent the range of geographic and cultural diversity in the community, and encourage gender balance.

It is advantageous to have some members with access to a variety of existing community resources, so that they can bring these resources to the support of the round table's work. Members with a broad network of contacts are also able to "spread the word" effectively and develop consensus within sectors represented.

There are several ways in which members can be chosen for a local round table. A community may generate a local round table on its own, either from an existing multi-stakeholder body or by appointing nominees or volunteers from its range of sectors.

Where a local round table is initiated by local government, members could be selected and appointed by that government. For instance, members to the B.C. Round Table on the Environment and the Economy were selected by the provincial cabinet. Alternatively, a local government might identify major sectors and ask representative organizations from those sectors to nominate a member. It is important to make clear to these organizations that members are to represent a sector or perspective, and not a given organization. The member should be free to participate according to his or her own values.

While members come to the round table as representatives of *sectors* of the community, they participate as individuals.

A nominating committee made up of both government and non-government representatives could be formed, with the responsibility of formulating selection criteria and identifying prospective members. Public advertising may also be used to find members. Selection criteria and qualifications should be part of the advertisement and a separate selection committee formed to decide on the appointment of members.

A NOTE ON GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES AS MEMBERS

Government representatives play a somewhat different role than other members.

Local round tables may include representatives from local, provincial or federal governments as full or ex-officio members. These representatives can be either political(elected officials), or bureaucratic(government staff). In either case government representatives play a somewhat different role than other members in that they do not represent a particular community interest. In most situations, the role of government representatives is to inform the round table of pertinent government programs and to advise it of legal and policy requirements pertaining to topics being addressed.

Government representatives can also advise on the level of government interest and commitment to proposals that a round table may be considering. These representatives can also act as liaisons with government, not only informing the round table of applicable government programs but keeping officials and politicians abreast of the round table's ideas and activities. Finally, government representatives can be an important conduit to tap the financial and technical resources that various line agencies can offer.

With these factors in mind, a local round table should decide whether a direct line to government through representation is needed or whether the work of the round table is better served by being independent from government.

CHAIR

A chairperson can be chosen by the appointing body, or by the local round table itself as one of its first tasks. It is important that the chair be seen as neutral and is respected by all sectors represented on a round table. The chair should also be experienced in facilitating group processes, so that he or she can assist the group in seeking consensus. An alternate to the chair should also be identified to take on the duties of the chair should that person be absent.

It is important that the chair be seen as neutral and is respected by all sectors represented on a round table.

AN OPTION: USING A FACILITATOR OR FACT-FINDER

In addition to, or as an alternative to, choosing a chair from among its members, a local round table or its appointing body may wish to consider hiring a professional facilitator to advise on or even run the meetings. The objective is to ensure neutrality on all issues and expertise in facilitating the round table's deliberations.

Hiring a facilitator to chair meetings will likely be beyond the means of most local round tables, but there are other ways in which a professional might assist on an as-needed basis. A facilitator could be brought in to help a local round table get started. For example, he or she could run a seminar or workshop for the members on consensus-building, or advise on rules of decision-making. A local round table could hire a professional for a short time to facilitate a public forum on a contentious issue, or to advise it on specific issues related to strategic planning, public involvement or government policy-making. Bringing in such expertise will depend on the round table's budget and the ability to draw on its own membership or local expertise on a volunteer basis.

The terms of reference should be sufficiently broad to allow a local round table to examine sustainability of the community from all perspectives.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The terms of reference should be sufficiently broad to allow a local round table to examine sustainability of the community from all perspectives. Within that broad mandate, a local round table can direct its energies to specific tasks. Such as providing the public with information, finding effective means of resolving conflicts over economy/environment issues, or developing sustainability strategies.

The mandate of a round table should not be limited to a specific issue or set of issues, as this hampers its ability to address sustainability comprehensively. Broad terms of reference could be put in place at first by the initiating agency. The local round table could then set more specific objectives and tasks for itself within that framework as it gets underway. It is also useful to review these objectives and the terms of reference periodically to ensure that there is still broad support within government, the public and the round table itself to continue to pursue those tasks, and to reduce overlap with other agencies and advisory bodies.

TERMS OF OFFICE

Setting terms of office establishes an outside limit on time commitment that many members will appreciate. It also allows for a change in membership as new expertise is required. Terms should likely be staggered to allow some level of continuity of membership and avoid excessive turnover in any one year.

STAFF

Many local round tables will not be in a position to have their own support staff. But if they do, they should perhaps clarify, at least informally, the role of staff

and the relationship between staff and members. This will help to avoid any confusion over the use of staff time, resources and advice.

GETTING STARTED ON THE RIGHT FOOT

It is important that a local round table spend some time at the beginning defining how it will operate. This will establish the procedures for addressing substantive matters more effectively, and give members the opportunity to build good working relations, develop common understanding and appreciation of other perspectives, and build trust. Agreeing on procedural matters paves the way for reaching agreement on substantive issues.

There are a number of procedural matters that a local round table can collectively determine.

DECISION-MAKING: DEFINING CONSENSUS

Round tables work on the basis of consensus, as opposed to voting (decision by majority rule), arbitration (decision by an authority), or some other form of decision-making. These other modes typically result in winners and losers, whereas decision- making by consensus seeks to find a common solution that can satisfy most of the needs of all parties.

Consensus means that all parties agree to the decision – or perhaps more accurately, no party substantively disagrees with the decision. Most major decisions that a round table will face cover a set of issues or items. Any member's support on an item-by-item basis may vary from enthusiastic to "willing to live with it", but it is essential that each member agree to the

"For some people, achieving consensus is a means for balancing the pressure of powerful special interests with a method to ensure that weaker advocates have fair opportunity to influence results. For others, consensus-seeking is presented as a way to ensure that agreements when implemented are capable of standing the test of time."

B. Fraser, 1991: Multi-stakeholder Involvement in Public Decision-making Processes.

decision as a package. In other words, members may not agree with all aspects of a decision, but the overall level of support from each member to the decision as a whole is sufficient to achieve consensus.

In its 1992 publication *Reaching Agreement Vol. II*, the B.C. Round Table notes: "Another important element of a consensus process is the requirement for unanimity. In effect, each participant has a veto, or the ability to prevent a given outcome. This requirement is often viewed as an impractical or unreasonable test; yet it is essential in order to give all participants equal influence over a decision. Rather than being concerned with how many are "on their side", participants are motivated to consider areas of accommodation, to seek solutions that meet the interests of the other participants as well as their own, and to search for innovative solutions in order to reach closure."

The goal of the Round Table is to arrive at all decisions by consensus.

For the most part, simple language can be used to express the goal of decision-making by consensus. The consensus policy of the B.C. Round Table includes these objectives:

"The goal of the Round Table is to arrive at all decisions by consensus. For matters of substance associated directly with its mandate, the Round Table strives for unanimity. Unanimity should be read here as meaning no substantive disagreement and this implies no public expression of dissent. Each member has an obligation to articulate interests, propose alternatives, listen to proposals, and build agreements."

To make consensus a workable method of decision-making, it is also necessary to determine how to proceed when there is less than unanimous agreement. A local round table needs a process by which it can address the concerns of

members that disagree with a proposal. It also needs to determine a fallback when, in the final analysis, unanimity cannot be achieved. It should decide whether it will still formulate a decision or recommendation, and if so, how it will take opposing views into account. Here is an excerpt from the consensus policy of the B.C. Round Table on the Environment and the Economy:

"When unable to support a consensus, a member has an obligation to demonstrate that: the item at issue is a matter of such principle/importance that he or she would be substantively and adversely affected by the proposed decision; and it justifies holding up proceeding.

The Round Table has an obligation to creatively seek solutions where disagreements occur; to accommodate or balance the views of the members while weighing the collective public interest of the matters before it; and to clearly state the issues in disagreement and the reasons why the disagreement exists."

The Round Table is charged with endeavouring to resolve any outstanding disagreements "through full discussion".

The policy also provides for a special sub-committee to be struck if unresolved disagreements occur within core groups (committees)or the Round Table as a whole. The sub-committee strives to reach a resolution to which its members can agree, and reports back to the Round Table. The Round Table is charged with endeavouring to resolve any outstanding disagreements "through full discussion". If, in the final analysis, issues are still unresolved, the Round Table may still submit a report to Cabinet but will also report areas of disagreement.

A local round table may wish to limit the requirement of consensus to decisions on substantive issues. Many administrative matters, such as location of meetings, are not central to the fundamental objectives of local round tables and can be dealt with by less demanding decision-making rules.

Open meetings allow the public to become informed of the round table and its activities and to observe consensus-building in action.

MEETINGS

A local round table should determine the frequency and location of its meetings. For example, will meetings occur in one central location or in different parts of the region? It should also define in-meeting rules for such things as addressing the chair or the round table as a whole, receiving delegations and keeping of minutes.

Whether meetings of the round table should be open to the public must also be decided. Open meetings allow the public to become informed of the round table and its activities and to observe consensus-building in action. They also foster a sense of ownership that assures the round table is truly representative of its concerns. At the same time, open meetings can inhibit dialogue, expression of uncertainties, and the give-and-take that is essential in striving for consensus. A member may feel more pressured to take a stand and not budge from it when being observed by the public than when in more confidential surroundings.

A compromise may be to make some meetings open and some closed, or to vary in the closed/open rules in meetings of sub-committees versus the full round table.

A local round table may also wish to address the issue of attendance. Commitment through regular attendance is essential, and the round table should make clear the criteria by which membership may be subject to review or withdrawal upon consistent absenteeism.

ROLE OF THE CHAIR AND COMMITTEES

The members should agree on the duties and powers of the chair, to avoid any future confusion about that person's role.

Forming committees is a useful method for addressing specific substantive issues, representing particular public interests, or handling administrative matters when a variety of topics are being dealt with simultaneously. The operation of committees should be addressed, including their terms of reference, their mode of decision-making, their reporting relationship to the whole round table, and how their findings and decisions will be used.

REPORTING TO THE COMMUNITY

A local round table is accountable to the community that it represents, and must set up the means by which it reports to the public on its findings and recommendations. A local round table should also make clear its working and reporting relationship with local government, for it is through the government that the round table can influence public policy and programs. It is suggested that to reinforce neutrality, local round tables establish a policy of reporting to government and to the public at the same time.

A local round table is accountable to the community that it represents, and must set up the means by which it reports to the public.

In addition, there should be opportunities for local governments to refer issues to local round tables for objective deliberation, as well as for local round tables to bring forward matters of concern to local governments.

The nature of reports and the frequency of reporting should be determined ahead of time. For example, a round table could produce an annual report summarizing its initiatives and products for both government and public use. It may wish to keep in touch on a more frequent basis through a newsletter, for instance, and through regular meetings with key government officials or bodies.

MEMBERS' RESPONSIBILITIES

Each member has the dual responsibility of informing the community of the work, policies and recommendations of the round table, as well as bringing community concerns to the round table. This is particularly true with respect to the sector that each member may represent. This responsibility should be articulated in the round table's terms of reference.

A more fundamental responsibility of round table members is to recognize that the collective interest supersedes individual or sectoral interests.

This responsibility requires that members establish effective lines of communication and means of conferring with the sector which they represent. This can be as simple as keeping in touch by mail, phone or fax, writing articles and soliciting responses through newspapers and newsletters, and giving talks at meetings of interest groups and associations.

A more fundamental responsibility of round table members is to recognize that the collective interest supersedes individual or sectoral interests. A commitment to establishing and maintaining a dialogue, to listening to other viewpoints, and to sharing ideas and resources for a common goal is essential.

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

A local round table may wish to agree on how it will communicate with government, the public and other round tables. For instance, will all direct

communication with government be through the chair? Should there be a member or committee designated to manage public relations, in terms of preparing written material and delivering presentations? Are members free to accept any speaking engagements or write articles under the auspices of their round table?

The round table may wish to establish a policy that assures full public access to its work and information. If confidentiality is of concern in terms of information that is provided to the round table by its members or from other sources, the members may also wish to provide for appropriate confidentiality when dealing with sensitive matters.

MILESTONES AND DEADLINES

Deadlines play an important role in consensus processes because they provide incentive to reach agreement as well as the means for terminating the process when consensus cannot be reached. A local round table may wish to commit itself to establishing deadlines and to make every attempt to achieve deadlines set for any project.

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A round table may also consider setting some timelines, milestones or review dates for specific objectives or tasks that it sets for itself, for example in developing a strategy for community sustainability, or in reporting annually to government or to the public.

SUPPORT AND FUNDING

The desire and commitment must lie at the community level in order to really make both sustainability and a local round table work. Communities need to

look within themselves for the support required to get their local round table up and running.

There is much that can be done with volunteer labour and resources from supportive people and organizations. For instance, meeting rooms can be found in government or corporate offices; members can be called on for writing, organizational or other special skills; projects and programs can get off the ground through partnerships with other community groups.

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Nonetheless, there are several basic needs that require secure financial resources or commitment. These include:

- secretarial support for minutes and correspondence;
- photocopying;
- mailing charges and basic stationery supplies;
- long-distance telephone calls; and
- travel costs where members are drawn from an extensive area.

Additional budgetary needs for more ambitious activities include:

- public education and information activities, including workshops, demonstration projects, school materials, and public forums;
- advertising and promotion;
- professional writing and publishing;
- travel and registration fees to attend conferences and workshops;
- research and analysis; and
- special hands-on projects.

If a local round table is officially established or recognized by a municipal or regional government, then it is reasonable to expect some base funding and secretarial or technical support (such as an engineer, planner or special coordinator) to cover basic activities.

Sources of funding and expertise for more extensive initiatives include:

- additional local government budget commitment;
- local, provincial or national organizations that can provide financial support, technical advice or support services on particular issues of concern to them;
- donations from local businesses, industries or from the public to help cover expenses associated with specific projects and organizations or corporations which could be encouraged to sponsor programs or projects in their areas of activity;
- fund-raising events;
- part-time secondment of staff from government agencies or corporate contacts to assist with the technical side of particular issues or activities; and
- provincial or federal government grants or programs which could be applied to sustainable development initiatives.

There are currently no specific government program funds earmarked for supporting local round tables. There may be support, however, for specific projects which fit the priorities of various government agencies. Local round tables should contact the local or regional offices of provincial and federal agencies to obtain information.

There is much that can be done with volunteer labour and resources from supportive people and organizations.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The B.C. Round Table has published several reports that can help in getting started:

- *A Better Way: Creating a Sustainable Development Strategy for B.C.* 1990.
- *Air Quality Issues.* 1990.
- *Choosing the Right Path - Sustainable Communities: Getting Started.* 1991.
- *Municipal Water Supply Issues.* 1990.
- *Reaching Agreement Volume 1: Consensus Processes in British Columbia.* 1991.
- *Reaching Agreement Volume 2: Implementing Consensus Processes in B.C.* 1992.
- *A Sustainability Strategy for Energy.* 1992.
- *Sustainable Communities.* 1991.
- *Sustainable Land and Water Use.* 1991.
- *Towards a Strategy for Sustainability.* 1992.
- *Waste Management Issues.*

The following publications can also provide ideas and contacts:

- National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy. 1990. *Sustainable Development and the Municipality.* (1 Nicholas St., Suite 520, Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 7B7)
- Ontario Round Table on the Environment and the Economy. 1991. *Local Round Tables on Environment and Economy: a Guide.* (Suite 1003 - 790 Bay St., Toronto, Ontario, M7A 1Y7)
- UBC Centre for Human Settlements. 1989. *Planning for Sustainable Development: A Resource Book.* Vancouver.
- World Commission on Environment and Development. 1987. *Our Common Future.* London, Oxford University Press.
- IUCN, UNEP, WWF. 1991. *Caring for the Earth: a Strategy for Sustainable Living.* Gland, Switzerland. 228 p.